DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 853 CS 212 620

TITLE Understanding Reading and Writing. Children and Language Series.
INSTITUTION Tasmanian Education Dept., Hobart (Australia).
REPORT NO ISBN-7246-0633-5
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 75p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly; portions printed on colored paper. For other titles in this series, see CS 212 616-619.
AVAILABLE FROM The Marketing Officer, Department of Education and the Arts, 71 Letitia Street, North Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 7000 ($A5.00 plus postage).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Instructional Effectiveness; *Language Acquisition; *Language Skills; Metalinguistics; Reading Diagnosis; Reading Instruction; *Reading Processes; Reading Programs; Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Written Language
IDENTIFIERS Australia (Tasmania); Childrens Writing; *Emergent Literacy; Language Functions; Literacy Events; *Writing Development

ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers in Tasmania, this booklet discusses making sense of language, the nature of written language, language and context, and organizing knowledge of the world. Chapter 1, Understanding Reading, contains a general discussion of the reading process as well as sections on the beginning and continuing reader, planning a reading program, the reader in difficulty, and evaluating progress in reading. Chapter 2, Understanding Writing, explores the writing process, varieties of writing, levels of abstraction in language, starting points for writing, and reviewing the program. The booklet also contains a section of children's writing and a selected reading list. Numerous black and white photographs illustrate the text. (MG)

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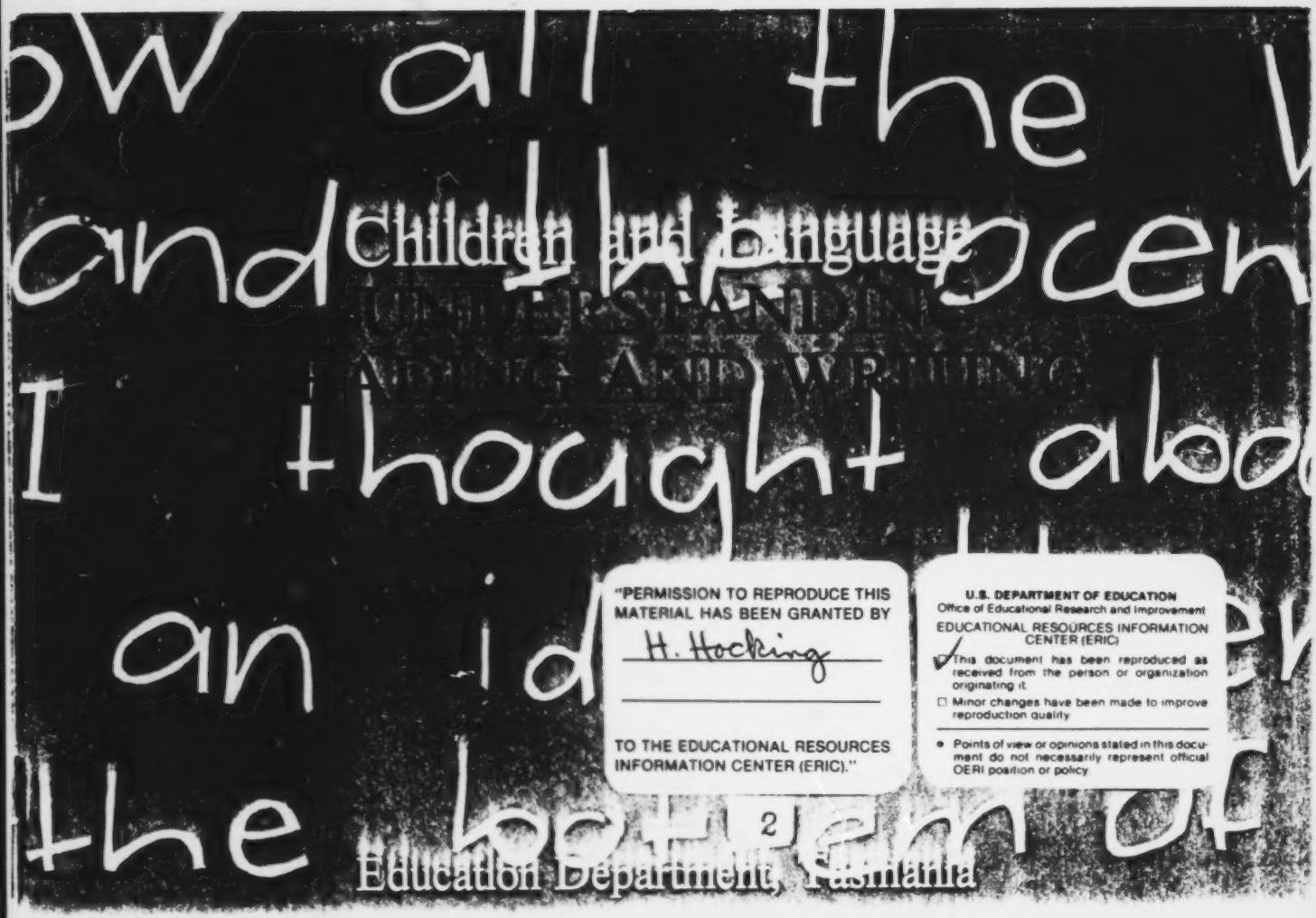
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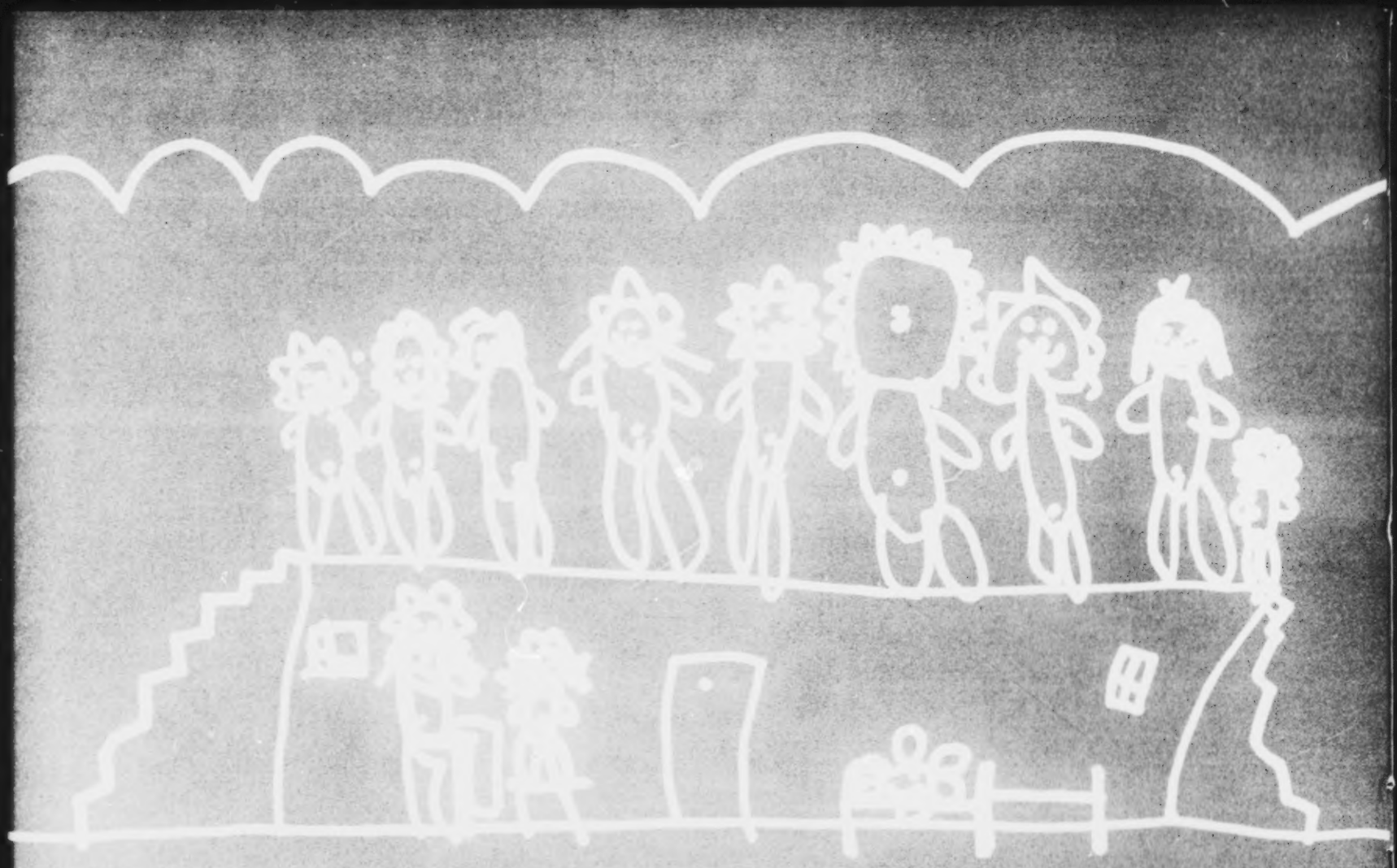

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Children and Language
UNDERSTANDING READING AND WRITING

Education Department, Tasmania

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Preparation
Primary Language Committee

Cover design
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First published 1984

ISBN 7246 0633 5

52-84 Publication and Information Office, Education Department, Tasmania, Australia
Printed by A.B. Caudell, Government Printer, Tasmania

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Introduction

Making sense of language

When children come to school they have already learned to use language to serve many communicative purposes. Even if they are unable to formulate their knowledge in words, children already know that language can be used to express feelings, to pass on information and to direct and persuade others. They expect language to make sense. They also know that the structure of language itself provides clues to meaning. For example, if children hear 'Don't put that book on the...', they know what kind of word will follow. The utterances they hear make sense in the context in which they hear them. Making sense of language requires that language be predictable and satisfy the listener's expectations. Listeners must be able to exclude alternatives in advance as they sample speech, otherwise they would be overwhelmed by the possibilities. Most of the everyday words in our language have not only many meanings but many grammatical functions as well. 'Hand' can mean a part of the body, a number of cards in a card game or a person's handwriting, as well as any of several different actions. But our knowledge of grammar, of meaning and of the properties of letters and sounds enables us to predict at a number of linguistic levels. So we do not need to attend to every word we hear as we sample speech for the most effective cues to meaning. Further sampling confirms, or calls into question, the predictions we have made and we may accept, revise or reject our earlier predictions.

Making meaning from speech is a continual process of sampling, predicting and confirming. When children come to school, they already have the ability to use these strategies. And when teaching children to read and write, it is important to make use of the skills they already have.

The nature of written language

While written and spoken language are closely related, the two differ in important respects in the areas of syntax and vocabulary. Written language has to replace the oral conventions of pause, stress and pitch with new patterns of syntax and conventions such as punctuation and the size and design of letters. The spoken word exists only at the moment of utterance and can be recaptured only if held in the listener's memory. The written word, on the other hand, is held on the page for the reader to review at any time.

At school children expect to be helped to read and write. In dealing with the written word, the child must move from the sound symbols of speech to print symbols which are combined on the page through various conventions. To be able to replace the sounds and meanings of speech with the signs of written language, the child must be able to control a number of forms of symbolisation interrelating experience, speech and writing. These interrelations can be quite abstract but they can be grasped if the child learns to make meaning the centre of attention.

Language and context

Spoken language has more ways of expressing meaning than written language has. As well as using the auditory devices of pause, stress and pitch, the speaker can use visual cues, such as facial expression, gesture and posture. In addition, speech is supported by the situation in which it occurs. Spoken language is grounded in the here and now and tied to the environment in which it is produced. Written language, on the other hand, can be independent of the situation in which it was written or is read: its

form is frozen on the page. This permanence offers writers and readers flexibility in the strategies that can be used for the production or interpretation of written language. Writers can edit and refine their message; readers can read ahead as well as review text in its original form.

Although independent of situation, however, written language does depend upon the language context for its underlying meanings. This context is formed by the particular combination of words in the text. As well, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs combine to produce a larger coherent unit of meaning. So no word in an actual passage means quite what the dictionary says; it is modified by the context in which it is found.

Words are combinations of conventions either of sound or of print. Sound and print symbols are related in conventional ways which have to be learned but this relationship, too, varies as a result of the immediate print context. Consequently, it is impossible to say accurately: 'See this letter, then say that sound'. The letter 'p' varies its sound significance depending upon the letters with which it is combined (e.g. *ph*armacy, *pr*etty). The sound-letter relationships of our language are complex. Many sounds have several different spellings; up to four letters may be used to represent one sound; in some words certain letters or combinations have ceased to represent any sound at all.

Organising knowledge of the world

A person's memory is a constantly growing source of information about the world. As the individual seeks to make sense of daily life, the memory's organisation is built up through the experience of both language and the world. In talking and listening to children, adults act and talk to make clear what is important, what the child should pay attention to and what must be remembered. In a similar manner, reading and writing activities which deal with the child's daily life are important because these activities require the child to draw upon memory and experience in an organised manner. These activities, in turn, give the child new opportunities to support and extend memory and to reorganise it in the light of experience.

Listening, speaking and doing all help children to build up an interim understanding of the life they share with others. On entering school each child already has ways of making sense of the world. These ways must be used and extended if the child is to learn to comprehend reading and writing.

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1 Understanding reading

Before going to school, children meet print in many forms: in books, on shop-fronts, in newspapers, in magazines etc. But they live in a predominantly oral society. Learning to read requires them to grasp not only a new symbol system but also new aspects of language. If listening and speaking help children develop their powers of thinking, then reading and writing help them to notice language and to begin to be aware of their own ways of thinking. Studies of reading behaviour over recent years have resulted in an emphasis on reading as both a thinking process and a way of extending the thinking process.

Language is used to communicate, to articulate and to obtain meaning. So each of the modes of language – listening, speaking, writing, reading – has a communicative purpose. Reading is an activity predominantly concerned with meaning; this meaning-making aspect of language is known as semantics. In the past, reading was often regarded as an activity that was made up of many separate sub-skills that could be taught in isolation and somehow joined together in the brain to make the act of reading possible. But if this method of teaching is used in isolation, the child may learn the mechanics of the reading process but get no

insights into the strategies that are involved in obtaining meaning. Learning the mechanical aspects of reading without attention to meaning is like trying to assemble a complicated jigsaw without first seeing the picture. It is seeing the picture that helps one understand how to put the parts together and which parts are of particular importance.

In all reading, it is *context* which gives the reader some notion of the 'possible pictures' that may be constructed from a particular text. The reader, like the speaker, must confidently expect that the various language structures encountered will be combined into a coherent passage of meaning. Comprehending what is read is concerned with this overall meaning, not just with word-focused activities.

But while the reader should expect all the language patterns to form a larger and coherent unit of meaning, print on a page is organised into a number of syntactic units. Words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs etc. are units of the syntax of any text. The reader notes the significance of word endings, the place and use of function words (prepositions, conjunctions etc.), the importance of word order and so on. Written language takes the syntax of oral language, adds to it and in some cases transforms it considerably. In learning to make statements, ask questions and give commands, the child has also acquired the basic grammar of the language and the ability to place words in sequences which others can understand. It is true that words have dictionary meanings—frequently several meanings in fact. But when words are combined their meanings are modified, even changed and frequently added to. So the child learns language in context and learns not only what words denote but also something of the host of connotations which each word has accrued over generations of use.

The child has begun with language as sound. In learning to be at home with print and writing, the child has to learn how the meanings of speech are represented on the page. The learner has to begin with a belief that the shapes on the page make sense and build from there to a more systematic knowledge of how letters and sounds relate in the writing system. The ease with which an understanding of the letter-sound, or grapho-phonic, relations is acquired varies from child to child. Some children will develop this ability easily; others will need considerable assistance in acquiring basic competence.

Acquiring a command of the written modes of language, then, requires the child to be able to attend to:

- the semantic context
- the syntactic frames
- the grapho-phonic relations

And the child must be able to grasp that all these combine to produce shared meanings.

Readers use this information within a framework of certain basic strategies. That is, *they make use of their knowledge of the meaning of many words, of the way the English language flows, of letter-sound associations and of the logic of the piece being read.* They sample the salient bits of text, they anticipate certain syntactic and semantic patterns and, if confirmed in their expectations, they go on to further sampling of text. This sequence seems to occur in a cyclic and repeated manner. The reader who does not find predictions confirmed goes back to sample again and correct or adjust predictions appropriately before sampling the next chunk of print.

The cueing systems—the semantic, the syntactic, the grapho-phonic—and the related strategies are used by all readers. But there are no rules governing the degree to which any one cueing system or strategy will be used by any single reader. Not only do different readers employ the various processes in different and unique ways, individual readers also vary their use according to each reading task.

So the reading process can be seen as a pattern of complex behaviours which requires the integration of background knowledge, life experience and language. Reading is an active, creative and dynamic process. Deriving meaning involves continual interaction with the text. Comprehension is the gradual building of understanding which occurs throughout the reading of a piece. Comprehension is also influenced by the reader's purposes and interpretation of the author's intentions. And the competent reader continually adjusts the interpretation while reading (as the listener does with speech) and modifies the expectations of the remaining text.

With some texts a reader can use the full range of cueing systems, but other texts force a reader to rely more on one particular system. When a reader has inadequate background knowledge of the topic, for example, or when the language structure of the text is contrived, complex or unfamiliar, the reader may be forced to rely only on grapho-phonic cues. However, an overdependence on

grapho-phonics actually can impede comprehension and hinder the development of other basic reading strategies. This is why children should not be given texts that require excessive use of grapho-phonic cues. Too much reliance on this cueing system gives surface-structure information only and the mere identification of words does not necessarily lead to comprehension. Nor is the precise identification of words always necessary for successful comprehension to occur. The permanence of print allows the child to stop at any point to consider possible meanings, decide on a preferred interpretation and, in so doing, develop a growing understanding of the world.

The beginning reader

The child who is learning to speak is engaged in learning how to receive and express meaning. Similarly, in learning to write and read, the child is concerned with using language to make meaning. The child learned to talk by listening and speaking while involved in the shared life of the home. To learn to read, the child needs to be encouraged to look at print, to see its use in everyday life, to share books and to learn to use writing to extend an involvement with the world and with ideas.

Learning to read should be seen as a part of the child's total language development. Development can best be achieved by using and building on the language that the child has already acquired. Parents have a vital role to play in building the foundations for a child's development in reading. And as the child learns to read, parents' continuing interest and help are still needed if the child is to learn to enjoy reading and to read well.

There are many ways in which parents can help the child to become a reader:

- Exploring, investigating and discussing the environment with the child help the child to build the knowledge and vocabulary needed to make meaning from print.
- Encouraging the child to talk about experiences and to put them into some order promotes the development of skills that aid memory and build expectation.
- Reading, telling, enjoying and discussing favourite stories with the child can be combined with a sharing of chants, rhymes, songs and action games to help the child learn larger patterns of language.
- Allowing a child to make shopping lists, use cooking recipes or follow how-to-do-it manuals gives the child opportunities to see some of the practical purposes for reading.
- Drawing the child's attention to the print in the environment, in the street, in the supermarket or at the doctor's surgery helps the child learn to use print.
- Providing a range of fiction and non-fiction for the child to explore helps the child develop confidence in dealing with books.
- Encouraging the child to experiment and create with paint, crayon, paper, modelling materials, scrap materials and suitable objects from the environment helps the child find ways of responding to print.

In caring homes, children are involved in these kinds of activities alongside adults who help them note what is significant and talk about their understanding. Of course, not all children have had such home backgrounds, but schools and teachers can organise similar experiences for children so that language develops through purposeful activity. Since children come to school with varying

experiences of language and print, teachers need to determine each child's ability to make meaning from print. The answers to the following questions can help teachers determine what a particular child is able to do.

Does the child:

- expect to get meaning from print?
- expect or construct a story that goes with the pictures in a book?
- try to 'read' a familiar book by retelling the story and turning the pages at more or less appropriate times?
- show curiosity about the printed word by asking, for example, 'How do you write bulldozer?' or 'What's that word?'
- recognise his or her own name?
- enjoy listening and responding to stories?
- show interest in writing his or her own stories?
- show some understanding of how books are organised?

At home, children hear stories read and discussed at bedtime or on other suitable family occasions. They hear and remember the language of story-books; they note how to hold a book and follow the story; they learn to look at pictures and connect these pictures into stories.

This sharing of books is continued and developed at school if children hear stories every day. Children grow in linguistic and narrative confidence as they hear and tell well-loved stories. They need to hear favourite stories many times and to be given the opportunity to pore over the books in which such stories are found. As they browse, children frequently show how well they have remembered the stories, the organisation and the special language of books. Children at this stage will pretend to read, sometimes with all the inflections of a skilled reader, thus demonstrating that they are beginning to realise how permanently books store language. 'Pretend reading' provides occasions for the adult to involve the child in dramatic play and to encourage the child to talk about what has been understood of the story.

Teachers today realise that shared story-reading in the home has tremendous educational value for children. One of the ways teachers have responded to the success of this general approach has been to produce enlarged versions of successful books so that children have opportunities for shared reading in the classroom. In this way children are helped to notice aspects of print and illustration and to anticipate story development and outcome. Meaning accrues meaning. In other words, to obtain meaning from a story the reader must allow meaning to snowball. Shared reading gives each child an oral situation in which to make and review meanings.

The modes of language are subtly interrelated. It is through actual listening, speaking, reading and writing that the individual comes to understand and command each of these modes. So teachers encourage children to write their own stories about their own experiences and to read and talk about these stories. The importance of children's artwork in this learning process cannot be overestimated. Teachers also model for children by writing large-format books with groups of children. All these books are added to the classroom book corner to provide valuable reading material. Such books are a source of pride and contribute to a sense of purpose and to feelings of success.

In most classrooms today there are book displays which stimulate interest and which, typically, include work by the range of authors discussed in *Children and Books*. Good displays stimulate talk and shared laughter, help sustain children's efforts to read and encourage young readers to return to those books.

Story-telling and story-reading provide examples of language used in more extended and complex ways than those used in day-to-day living. Story is something we all enjoy, whether it be an anecdote about a common experience, a joke, an extended report upon events or a highly imaginative tale.

Fairy tales, legends and myths give the child an introduction to story patterns and provide a range of characters not usually encountered in actual life. The language, story patterns and characters in these narrative forms provide entertainment and comment about life. Also, because these stories belong to the oral tradition, they are memorable and lend themselves to successful retelling in oral or written form. In retelling the stories, children get to practise the syntax and vocabulary of written language. As the children grow in independence, of course, the language of their stories and books becomes more literary and less oral in style.

In recent years, writers of children's fiction have drawn upon the stories and language of oral tradition to a remarkable extent. Using these sources writers have created an intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying bridge between the oral world of infancy and the written world of school.

Most people like to tell stories as well as hear them. The experience of telling adds to a person's capacity to hear, or read, stories. Story building can begin with an object, a picture or another story. It can draw upon ordinary events or fables. Telling, writing, hearing and reading stories are interrelated and children benefit from participating in all of these activities in as many ways as possible.

Large-format books, books written by children and well-chosen books from the current range of published materials all give the teacher many chances to help children learn how print styles vary. The child's attention can be directed to the print and to the constant relationship between shapes, or groups of shapes, and what these shapes represent. In this way, the child becomes familiar with conventions such as letter order, possible sequences of letters, direction and orientation of print in space and the need for punctuation in printed language.

Any adult who wishes to help a young reader must be certain that the text provided is one from which the child can be expected to gain meaning. Consequently, the materials provided should be interesting and within the ability range of the young reader. Layout, illustrations and print should combine to support the language of the text and encourage child and adult to an imaginative sharing of the book. The young reader also needs frequent opportunities to select materials and share them with an adult.

The continuing reader

As they learn to read in a more sustained and varied way, children build sets of expectations which they can review or correct. These expectations, or anticipations, draw upon their experience of life, of story and of literature. And children's expectations are based upon their ability to interpret the world as well as the text.

As they gain experience in reading, children begin to make choices about the kinds of material they read. They become aware of topics they prefer, authors they like and story presentation which they can enjoy on their own. And as they become aware of their own preferences, they begin to acquire a notion of genre. Fairy tales can be distinguished from ghost stories, school stories, adventure stories etc. Though notions of genre are flexible, they are very important. Having a notion of a particular genre helps the reader engage successfully with any story of that kind.

Readers need to learn to decide the kind of reading a book requires and to adjust or review their reading accordingly. Speakers and listeners continually make such adjustments when discussing a topic. For example, the speaker has a number of ways to signal that

a joke is coming. If the listener misses the signal or does not understand the signal, the joke will be missed. Similarly, if a reader misses the clues that a writer, or a character, is being ironic, the passage will be misread. Many children find it difficult to adjust their language in speech as well as in reading. They are unyielding listeners and readers. They have difficulty listening to certain speakers and reading certain authors. The speaker or author must suit them or they cannot give their attention. These children need to be helped to become more flexible listeners and readers.

Every story has an implied voice (or voices) in which it may be told or heard. This voice indicates how the teller views the characters in the story and the reader. In traditional story-telling, the narrator adjusts the telling to suit the audience and its response. But books are not flexible in that way. The reader has to learn to assist the telling. Teachers can help young readers to notice clues to what sort of book or story is about to be read. They do this by discussing with children the cover, illustrations and title of the story, by reading some well-chosen passages aloud, by asking the child to anticipate outcomes while reading and by helping the child to give interpretations to others.

Meeting books of varying styles extends children's awareness of how language can be used in different ways to achieve different effects. For example, a book may have humour hidden in the language, may reveal its author's purpose only gradually if the clues are found or may even deliberately change direction to the delight of the careful reader. And children's growing awareness of style can carry over into their own writing. Older children sometimes enjoy trying out the style of a favourite author. This also helps them to begin to notice the ways in which an author's work gives clues to the kind of person the author may be. In a sense, young readers make friends with some authors and become familiar with their habits of talk and thought, their sense of humour and their attitude to life and children.

Children enjoy exploring their response to some stories. They like to read passages to others and to tell others about what really interested them in a story. They enjoy helping others, including adults, find a good book. Through illustrations, discussions and dramatic enactments, children can explore their understanding of a book, of a set of events in a story or of a character's attitudes. Discussions also help children to draw parallels between different stories and to begin to articulate a critical awareness of books they find appealing. Helping children to make thoughtful judgements while reading prepares them to read more fully later on and to make more thoughtful interpretations of the events in their own lives.

Although the aim of the reading program is to produce independent readers, teachers should continue to tell stories and read aloud to children throughout their school years. The teacher who reads and tells stories well and enthusiastically is modelling ways of using language so that it makes lively and interesting sense. Through the teacher's reading, children can enjoy stories, language and ideas far in advance of their own independent abilities. Listening to stories alerts children to what is waiting to be enjoyed in books as well as to some of the subtle skills a mature reader has available. This method of modelling the reading skills retains the integrity of the book and is a more successful method than teaching skills in isolation. The stories chosen should be of increasing length and should include some serials to permit ongoing discussions and recall sessions.

Hearing a difficult text read aloud well always helps listeners understand the material in future readings. Some children's fiction has changed in the ways authors expect the young reader to contribute while reading a story. Many traditional fairy and folk tales can be enjoyed without much effort on the hearer or reader's part. But some recent authors allow and encourage the child to contribute to the story and to be active in making sense of the author's description and comment. Choosing a text to read to children, like helping children choose fiction for themselves, requires the teacher to recognise aspects of difficulty.

Oral stories and printed fiction for young children typically follow a clear chronological sequence which makes it easy for the young learner to make sense of each passage, anticipate outcomes, remember and retell, or reread, the story aloud. Many of the more complex stories depend upon causal explanations that are not always obvious to the child. Yet other stories depend for their cohesion upon the psychological relationships among the characters and require the young reader to understand what motivates human beings. With necessarily limited experience of people, children need help to judge character and motivation. Reading about these matters extends the understanding children can obtain from actual life.

Many recent children's novels, stories and picture books present parallel narratives in which the author invites the reader to draw comparisons between characters and between values. The reader is invited to reflect upon competing ways of judging human life and to establish some basis for making conscious judgements about what is good.

Print has a tremendous authority. Fiction is a powerful means of shaping opinion and establishing prejudice, as well as a means of extending the young reader's range of viewpoints. Children need to be helped to evaluate the content of what they read and to decide whether or not a piece is well written. They must be encouraged to examine honestly, openly and critically the views they find expressed in literature and in reference books. Children need to see that while language can be used to inform, explain and entertain, it also can be a means of trickery, of misleading readers and of misinformation. Consequently, children need to be aware of their own grounds for judging and they need to know how opinions may

be tested for consistent argument and factual support. It is important that children be encouraged to formulate and review their judgements without over-assertive adult intervention. Poorly handled, such intervention stifles discussion and makes it difficult for the child to try out the tentative judgements that lead to informed opinions.

Book-discussion groups. Children need as many opportunities as possible to talk and write about what they read. These opportunities should help them become aware of story-telling styles as well as the styles required for presenting information. Discussions about books help children enjoy proposing, justifying and adjusting their understanding and interpretation of what they read. Currently there is considerable use of book-discussion groups to achieve these ends.

Book-discussion groups take a variety of forms but usually share common goals:

- to give children the opportunity to talk in small groups;
- to give them the opportunity and some help to search for shades of meaning;
- to enable children to share comments about the plot, characters and language of a book;
- to enable them to share their attitudes, beliefs and understandings;
- to help children learn to listen to others and value what they say;
- to let them find pleasure in language while enriching their own language store;
- to help each child begin to build and refine a personal value system;
- to give each child the ability to 'be' someone else and extend individual experience;
- to give children the chance to correlate situations in books with real life;
- to permit children to receive insights from the adult about more abstract meanings and more complex values and to hear the adult adjudicating values.

Children need to be helped to gain confidence in selecting their own books, both fiction and non-fiction. They need to learn to move beyond the attractions of the cover and, in the case of non-fiction, to learn how to survey the book to see how far it will serve their purposes. This confidence can be developed through discussions with peers so that children learn to formulate for themselves what it is they enjoy and what they need to find out. As they choose from a careful selection of reading materials, children will begin to assume responsibility for their own reading progress.

The following questions are suggested as possible starting points for a book-discussion group:

- What is going on in the story or what is the passage about?
- What happened before this point in the story or how does this passage connect with what the reader already knows?
- What sort of story is this? What sort of people are these characters? What sort of information is this?
- What could be expected to happen next? If non-fiction, where is this information going or what is the next topic likely to be?
- Was the reader's earlier anticipation justified and, if not, where did the reader or the group go astray in building expectations?

Reading aloud. Children begin reading by reading aloud. They enjoy saying what they are reading from a sign, a caption, a passage in a book, from their own writing or occasionally from the writing of a friend. Reading aloud enables children to hear the language and establish the meaning they are making. This early reading aloud is primarily for the child's own benefit and need not be heard by anyone else.

Adults and older children continue to read aloud in this way when they meet difficult material or passages which particularly appeal to them. Even as children grow into competent and confident silent readers and increase their range of topics and texts, they still will find occasions to share reading with others by reading aloud. For example, all readers enjoy sharing jokes and riddles with others.

As with all language development, the question of audience and purpose affects performance in reading aloud. Reading aloud can be part of classroom activities in a number of ways. Children can read aloud to share stories or information, to obtain help in understanding information or new ideas or to give support to some opinion or viewpoint they wish to express. Because reading is a complex process, the reader needs to be given the opportunity to prepare any passage before reading it aloud. The chosen passage, too, should have a unity and coherence which helps the reader and listener. And since reading aloud imposes considerable demands upon the reader, the teacher needs to provide audiences who will encourage the young reader to read appropriately and well. At different times and for different purposes, appropriate audiences could include individuals in the class, small groups, the whole class, other classes and interested adults who enjoy children's company.

Each of the modes of language is best developed where the child is given a good model and where the mode (listening, speaking, reading, writing etc.) is seen as part of daily life and used to fulfil human needs and purposes. With reading aloud then, children benefit from hearing adults use the mode for a wide variety of purposes. These will include reading stories, reading and discussing information, reading aloud to check ideas and details, reading maps and diagrams, and reading signs and instructions.

Advertising: reading to learn

Since advertising is a major source of information and is instrumental in the forming of opinions, it too offers opportunities for worthwhile language study that can contribute to overall language development and to the growth of critical awareness. Children are often enthralled by the powerful visual images used to sell various products. They enjoy the word play of advertisements and enjoy playing with words in creating their own advertisements.

Sharing their responses to advertising campaigns can help children learn to acquire and express opinions. Children become aware of how advertising can seize attention and muffle powers of criticism and this awareness can lead to the development of children's critical judgement. Their own daily experience with advertisements can also help children learn to use language to command the attention of others. And in so doing they become more aware of language itself.

Planning a reading program

To plan a reading program, teachers must take into account the background of each group but there are some common fundamental aspects that must always be considered.

Teachers need to consider children's interests, abilities and level of development. Personal development as well as the development of reading ability will be important in the choice of reading materials. The young reader's range of responses, for example, will depend on more than reading skills alone.

The teacher must be familiar with the variety of books currently available and the kinds of reading each book requires if the child reader is to engage with it successfully. Materials should be chosen keeping in mind the kind of language style used, the different kind of reading skills each book requires and the variety of responses a work encourages. If books and materials that are part of published reading schemes are chosen, they too must facilitate the child's pursuit of meaning. Some publishers have attempted to improve the linguistic and literary quality of their reading schemes but much of the material in such packages does not provide the reader with the depth of meaning which can be found in good literature for the young.

It is important for teachers to know the different kinds of reading their children are capable of so that children may be encouraged to enjoy reading and to improve their powers of interpretation. Providing opportunities to discuss interpretations is one way teachers get to know each child's ability to understand what is read.

It follows then, that children need to encounter a variety of books and print materials which should include:

- children's favourites from home, school and library;
- books written by children;
- fiction and poetry chosen by the teacher and by children;
- non-fiction materials including reference books, information books and how-to-do-it books;
- suitable newspapers and magazines.

Information reading. Children must be able to expect that whatever they read will make sense. To read for information, children need to see purpose in the activity. Every child requires help with those reading skills which aid the individual to use stored information in an investigative and independent manner. These skills are best taught in a purposeful program where children see a need for their own directories, maps and models. In such a program, children can be shown how to use tables of contents, diagrams and indexes to complete their own learning tasks.

Children can be helped to survey books to assess their usefulness for a chosen task. A comparison of various sources will help them to develop criteria for judging information books. They need to learn that they must first decide what it is they want to know, then formulate clear questions to be answered by the information sources. In this way children learn to skim, scan, select and collate information more efficiently. They learn to use tables of contents, opening and closing paragraphs of chapters, indexes, headings, sub-headings and other features of information books.

Once they have obtained answers to their questions, children need to learn to check that they have read accurately and in sufficient detail. They also need the opportunity to express in their own words what they have found out. Such discussion helps children

learn to summarise what they have gleaned from the reading and gives a good indication of how well they have grasped the material.

Matching children and books. Two issues which often arise when trying to match children and books can be put in the form of two questions:

- How able is the reader?
- How difficult is the book or printed material?

The answer to the first question has usually been given in terms of performance on a reading test. All tests have limitations because of built-in assumptions about children's development and the nature of reading itself—assumptions which may be at variance with a teacher's experience and understanding. If tests are used, the results should be considered in the light of the teacher's observations of the child's language development, interests, approach to books and ability to read other kinds of written language. This is because tests are at best indicators of an individual's performance on a particular test at a particular time. And tests designed to calculate a reading age do not necessarily tell anything about an individual's strengths, weaknesses and interests. Knowledge about a child's interests is crucial because individuals read far beyond their tested ability *when they encounter materials which meet, or excite, their interest.*

The second issue—the degree of difficulty of any book for any child—can best be assessed by a teacher who knows the child's interests, level of language development and general maturity and who has also read the books the child is meeting. Degree of difficulty is sometimes dealt with by using commercial materials which give the teacher a way of assigning the reader to a suitable level of difficulty based upon some test result. However, commercial materials are produced for the mass market so they are designed according to a generalised notion of the reader and of reading development. Literature, too, can be assessed using readability formulas but these are notoriously unreliable and provide only a general indication of difficulty. But if the teacher and the child talk together about the reading, the teacher can gain an understanding of the child's current ability and interests and help the child to select material which is enjoyable and rewarding. At the same time, the child can be alerted to the richer possibilities to come.

The reader in difficulty

Readers develop their reading ability in highly individual ways. Different readers become aware of the patterns of written language at different rates. In hearing stories and sharing books, young readers learn how to use and combine their strategies for making sense of written language. But some children learn these strategies only slowly and many have quite a restricted range of ways of making sense of text.

There are many reasons why some children are slower to develop their range of language uses. Some children may have experienced sensory impairments or specific learning difficulties that have impeded language development. Others may have had less encouragement to investigate, notice and talk about their world and the events and people in it. There may have been less exposure to stories and to the sequencing of actual events that stories help promote. Also, if children have had little time with books, they know little of how books can meet their changing and growing interests and can give them new interests.

It is vital that slow readers are given reading strategies appropriate to their stage of development and suited to their particular way of processing information and obtaining meaning. If these young readers are presented with materials which have overly restricted syntax and vocabulary, then the language in the book is remote from any language they might hear. They should be provided with opportunities to write exciting stories and to experience books with a syntax and vocabulary similar to those of their own everyday experience.

The teacher who seeks to help the slower reader needs to consider each child's strengths, weaknesses, background and interests alongside the total language program. Some children may need considerable help. All need to have stories told to them and they need the experience of telling stories to help them learn to order and sequence experience and to add to their powers of imagination. These children also need to dramatise from the stories they enjoy.

Children who experience reading difficulty need opportunities to enjoy written language. Writing their own accounts of events and their own versions of favourite stories gives them written materials about which they can feel confident. The material they write will use a vocabulary and a syntax which they can successfully anticipate. Their own work also will show them how others use writing and extend their understanding of how speech and print vary in their relationship. As well, collecting riddles and jokes, writing group stories and making story friezes—all provide experiences in which listening, speaking, writing and reading reinforce each other. In such ways, the less able reader becomes interested in and confident with print and is motivated to develop the skills and strategies necessary to make sense of written language.

Evaluating progress in reading

Progress in any area of schooling must be evaluated in terms of the learner's continuing growth and development. Evaluation criteria should assist the teacher to help the pupil.

Evaluation of progress in reading may be considered under three major headings:

Enjoyment. How much are the children enjoying their reading and finding pleasure in text? How varied is their reading? How much are they learning to find enjoyment in choosing their own reading? How much is reading becoming a self-renewing interest and an activity which adds to their interests?

Understanding. What sense are the children making of the texts they are reading? Can they make judgements about possible interpretations? Can they note implied meanings or 'fill the gaps'? Are they able to grasp the different ways in which books are organised, stories told or arguments presented? Can they select the important details in their reading and organise them into coherent patterns of meaning?

The child's reading strategies. Does the child understand how to approach print to produce meanings? Is the text helping the child build upon prior success to acquire further strategies for making sense of text? To what is the child paying attention in reading? What is the child doing in order to make sense of the text? Can the child adjust the reading to meet the demands of particular topics, styles of language and the particular purpose of reading?

The assessment of an individual child's reading strategies requires the adult to initiate activities and conversations which will reveal what the young reader is doing. The following are some starting points for the kind of discussion which can help the adult learn something of how a reader is approaching and responding to stories. Of course, the actual formulation of the questions will depend on the reader's age and development. But these are some of the features of the story that can be explored at an appropriate level:

- Who are the characters in the story and what kinds of characters are they? Who are the important characters? What do they think and feel about each other?
- Where and when is the story set? How is the setting important for understanding the characters and the actions?
- What do the characters do? What are the really important actions in the story?
- What are the characters' purposes in doing what they do? Are they wise in what they do? Are they right in what they do?
- What did the author really want the reader to think about when reading the story? What was the author's purpose in writing?

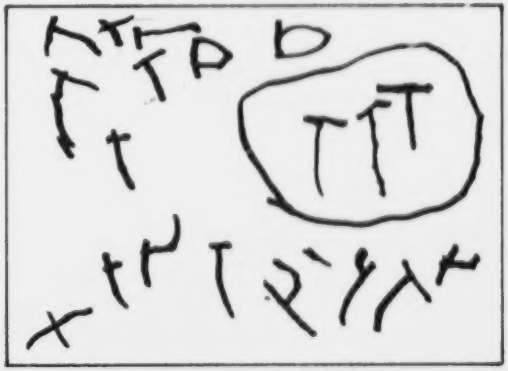
The term 'reading' labels a number of activities. But even though these activities may be emphasised and combined in different ways by different readers to suit different texts, they are always deployed in order to obtain meaning. Any approach which is used to evaluate a child's reading must retain this emphasis upon the child's ability to make meaning.

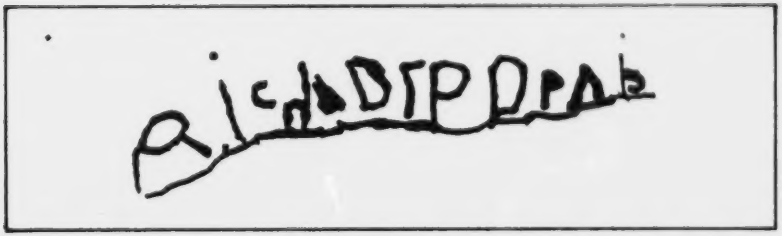
Assessment of children's progress in reading should concentrate on the degree to which an individual is gaining meaning. It should enable the teacher to extend the child's repertoire of approaches to print and facilitate a more sensitive matching of children and books. The teacher has to observe and record the range of books a child chooses to read. The language, topics and general intellectual demand of the books need to be noted, as well as the emotional demand, where relevant. Nor will it be enough to look at the *stories* the child reads; the demands of the reading in all curriculum areas must be considered when assessing how the child is coping with print.

As the understanding of the reading process has grown, the following important considerations have become established:

- *Unless the reader intentionally seeks meaning, little comprehension will occur. A child is most likely to seek meaning when there is a sense of personal purpose in the activity.*
- *Reading involves the interrelation of three cueing systems — the semantic, the syntactic, the grapho-phonic — within the overall framework of a passage.*
- *The act of reading involves a range of strategies used in flexible ways that are unique to each individual.*

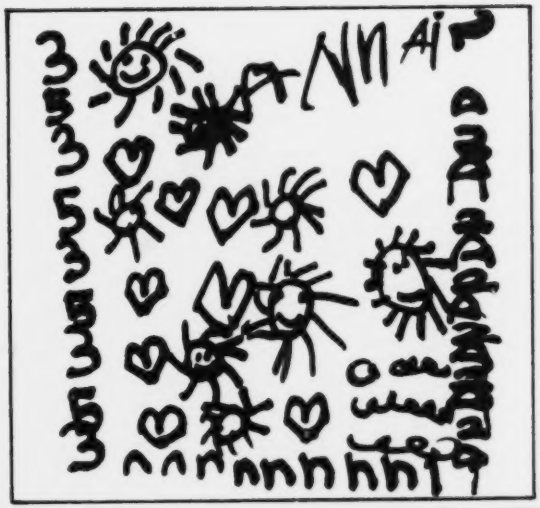
Children's writing





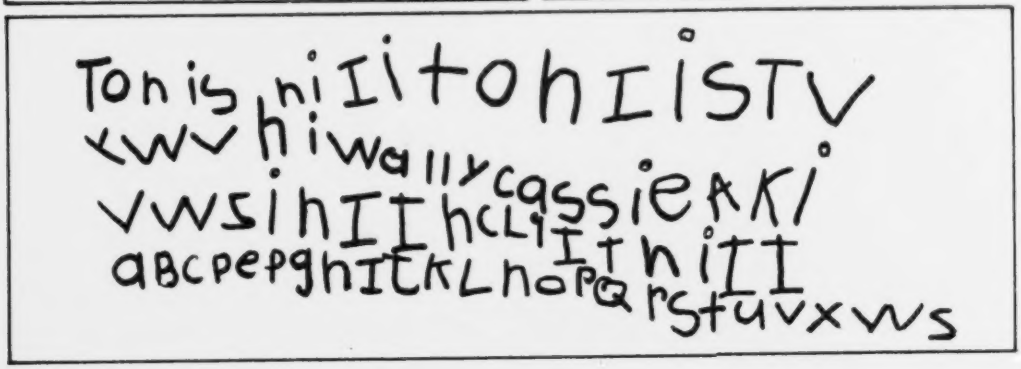
Two examples of young children's signatures.

Early writing.



Drawing and writing are often intermingled in young children's work.

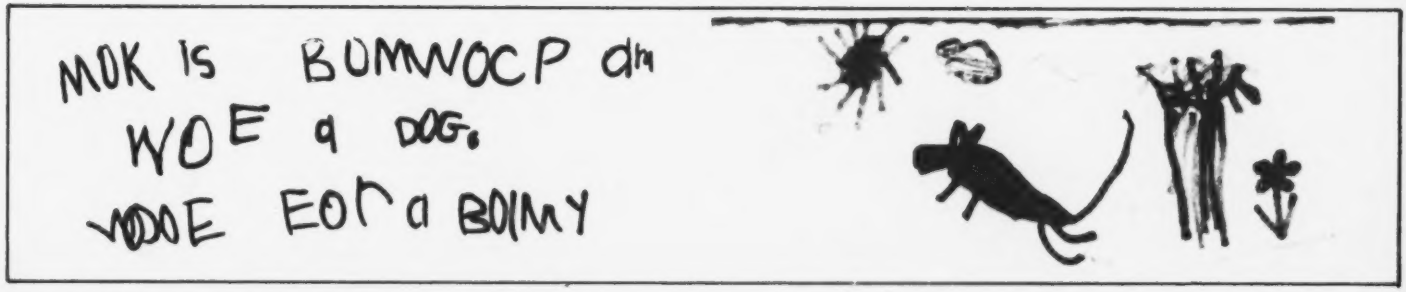
Conventional and unconventional letters (originally in three different colours) accompanied by drawing.



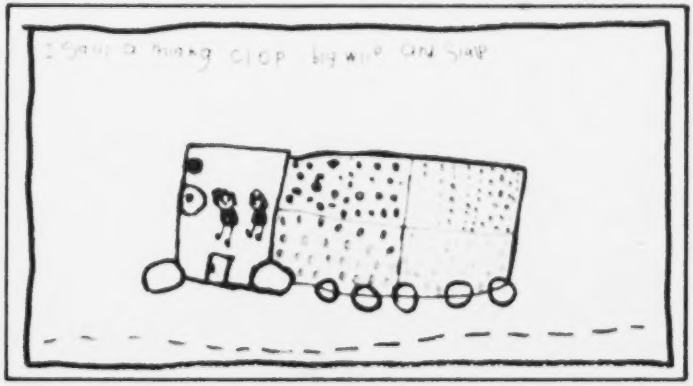
Strings of conventional letters, used to convey information.

'It is my dog. He has black and white spots and he likes to play with me. My dog likes to have splashes in water and the one thing my dog likes is to jump about when it's time for a walk.'

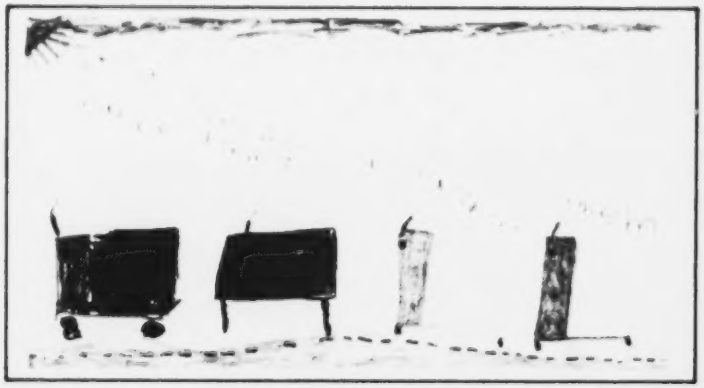
Child's response to hearing the story of *The Gingerbread Man*.
'O.K. said the 'ox. I'm going to eat you up.'



Groups of letters with spaces between groups.
'This is Barney and he is a dog. And he eats bones.'

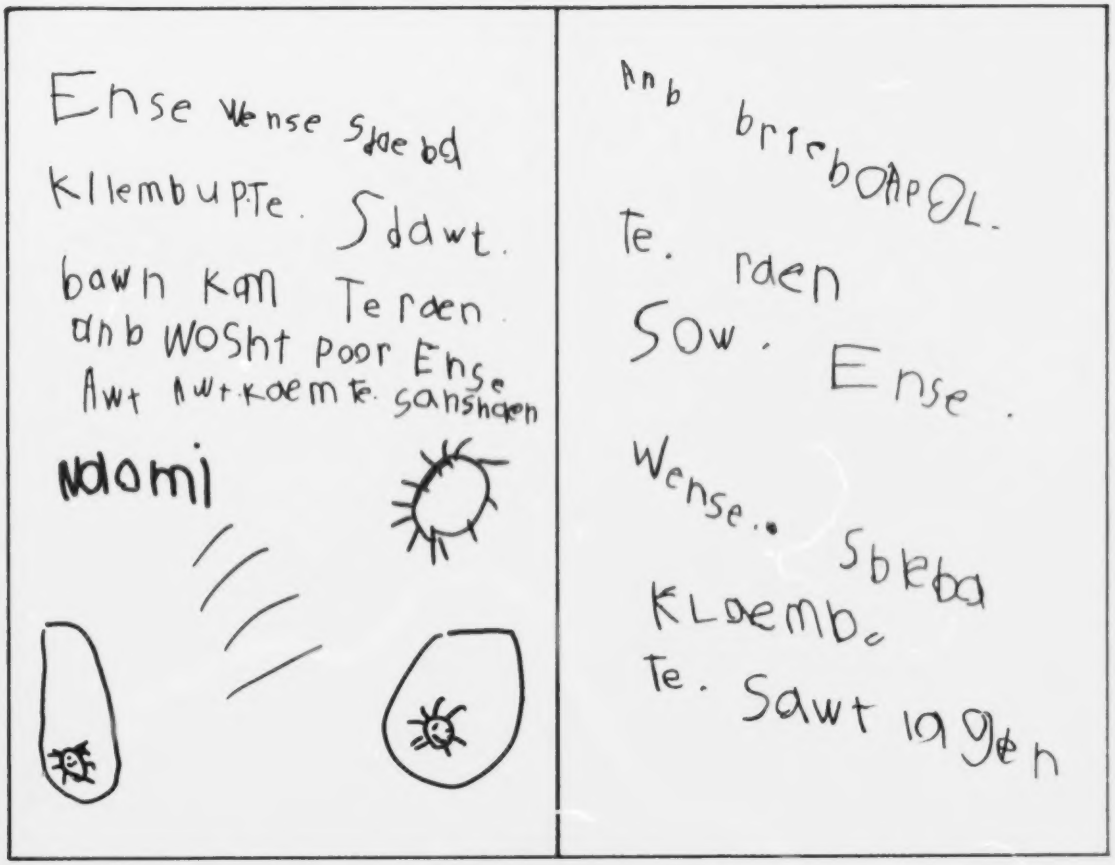


'I saw a movie called Big Wheels and Sailor.'



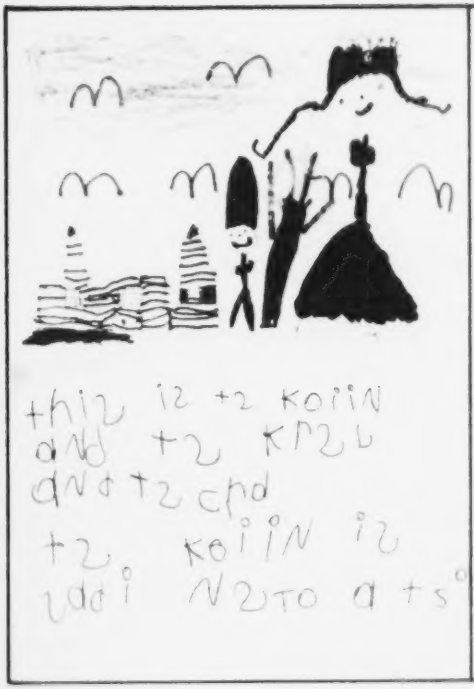
'This is big wheels and little wheels and all the other trucks.'

Writing and illustrations assuming a more formal relationship.



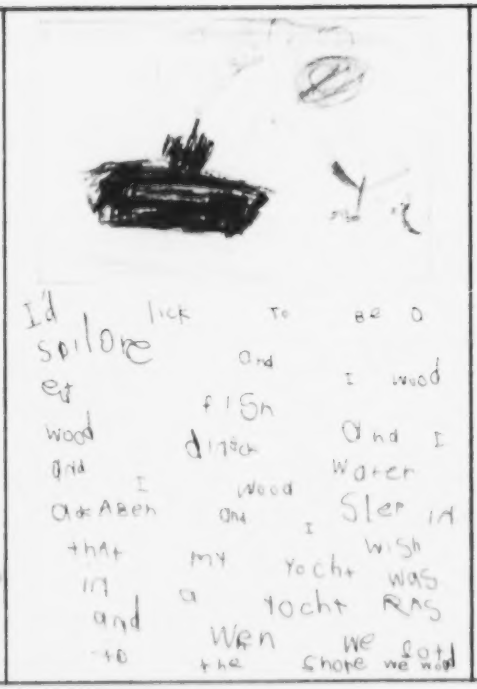
Child's re-creation of a favourite poem

Incy Wincy Spider
Climbed up the spout
Down came the rain
And washed poor Incy
out
Out came the sunshine
And dried up all the rain
So Incy Wincy Spider
Climbed the spout again

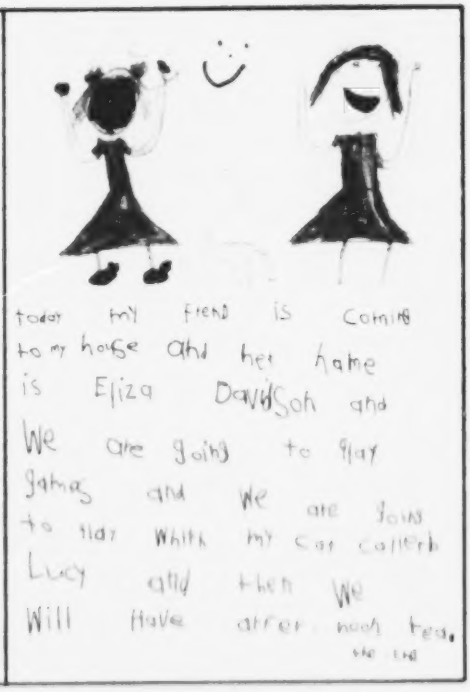


March: *'This is the queen and the king and the guard. The king is standing next to a tree.'*

Six months development in young child's writing.


I'd lick to be a
sailore and I would
eat fish
wood and drink and I
I wood water
a cabin and I sleep in
that my yacht was
in a yacht race
and when we
got to the shore we would

June: *'I'd like to be a sailor and I would eat fish and I would drink water and I would sleep in a cabin and I wish that my yacht was in a yacht race and when we got to the shore we would ...'*

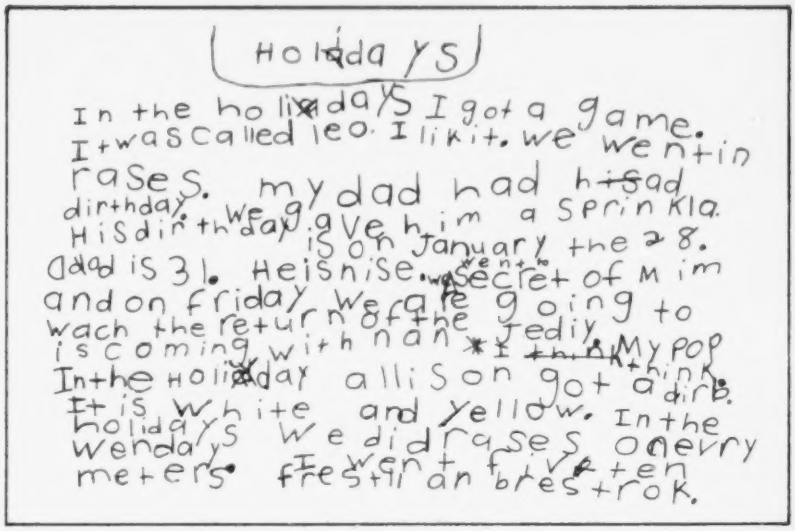

today my friend is coming
to my house and her name
is Eliza Davidson and
We are going to play
games and we are going
to play with my cat called
Lucy and then we
will have afternoon tea.
the end

September: *'Today my friend is coming to my house and her name is Eliza Davidson and we are going to play games and we are going to play with my cat called Lucy and then we will have afternoon tea. The end.'*

my mum had a
badi Iem goint g
to SE ho RFTSCL my
C us ms CAMTO STA AT
Hom I LIK mis
LeD S.ES my TETH I
LIK mis LeD SE Lons
my Fins and my TETuis
nis to mE sum TI ms and
Iem gonitig ho m for
LunT ILIc mis
DUM BeR

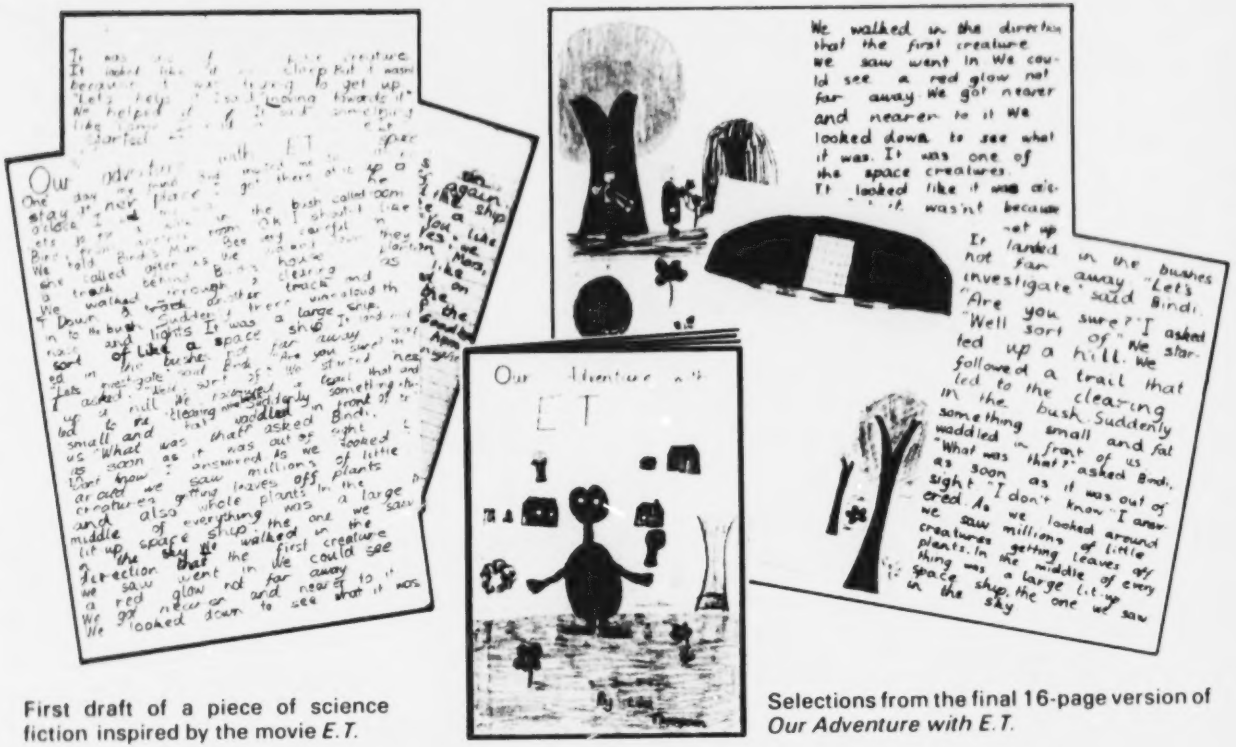
The work of a developing writer: non-fiction.

'My mum had a baby. I am going to see her after school. My cousins came to stay at home. I like Mrs L——. She's my teacher. I like Mrs L——. She loans me things and my teacher is nice to me sometimes and I am going home for lunch. I like Miss D——.'


Holidays
In the holidays I got a game.
It was called leo. I like it. we went in
raSeS. my dad had birthday.
dirthday. We gave him a sprinkla.
His birthday is on January the 28.
Dad is 31. He is nise. secret of Nim
and on friday we are going to
wach the return of the Jediy. My Pop
is coming with nan I think.
In the holiday allison got a dirb.
It is white and yellow. In the
holidays we did raSeS on every
wendays. I went fifteen
meters. free-style an breS+roK.

First draft of a young child's writing.

'In the holidays I got a game. It was called Leo. I like it. We went in races. My Dad had a birthday. We gave him a sprinkler. His birthday is on January the 28th. Dad is 31. He is nice. We went to Secret of Nim *and on Friday we are going to watch the* Return of the Jedi. *My Pop is coming with Nan. I think in the holiday Allison got a bird. It is white and yellow. In the holidays we did races on every Wednesday. I went fifteen metres free-style and breast-stroke.'*


We walked in the direction that the first creature we saw went in We could see a red glow not far away We got nearer and nearer to it We looked down to see what it was It was one of the space creatures
It landed in the bushes not far away "Let's investigate" said Bindi. "Are you sure?" I asked "Well sort of" We started up a hill We followed a trail that led to the clearing In the bush Suddenly something small and fat waddled in front of us "What was that?" asked Bindi. as soon as it was out of sight "I don't know" I answered We looked around we saw millions of little creatures getting leaves off plants In the middle of everything was a large lit up space ship the one we saw in the sky
Our Adventure with E.T.
By

First draft of a piece of science fiction inspired by the movie *E.T.*

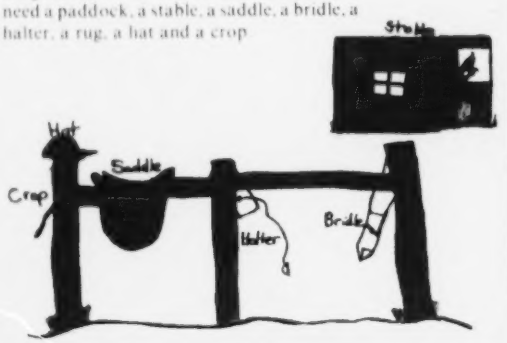
Selections from the final 16-page version of *Our Adventure with E.T.*

31

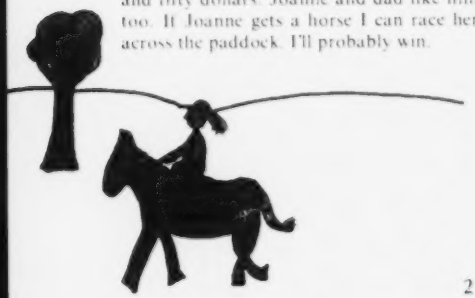
A child's 'published' book.

If I Get A Horse

If I get a horse I will call it Punter. I will also need a paddock, a stable, a saddle, a bridle, a halter, a rug, a hat and a crop.

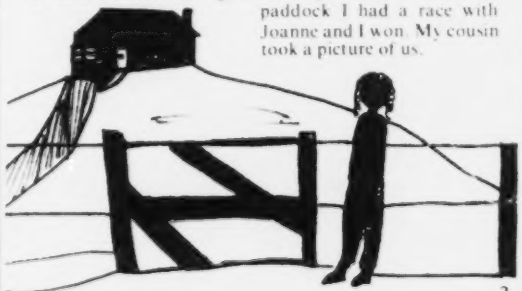


Up at Chigwell Riding School there is a little cute horse and he is for sale for four hundred and fifty dollars. Joanne and dad like him too. If Joanne gets a horse I can race her across the paddock. I'll probably win.



2

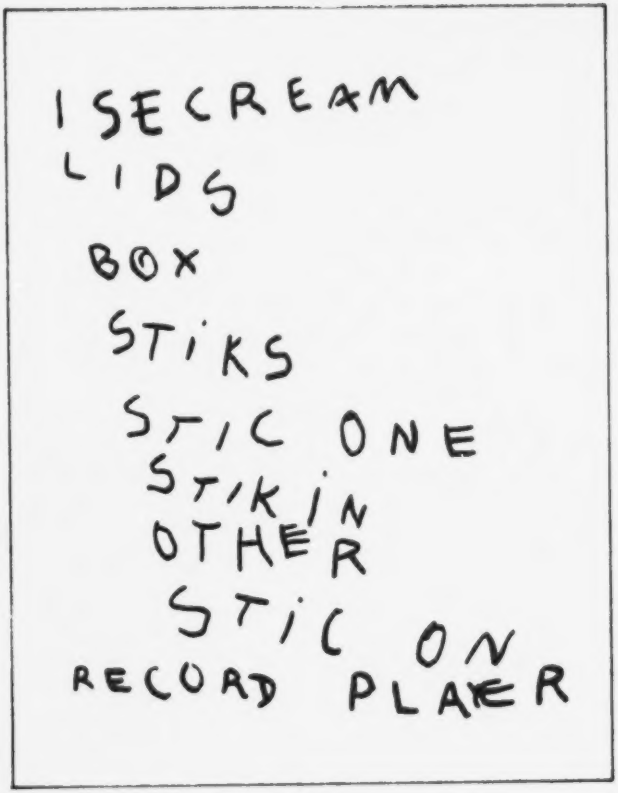
One day when we went horse riding, we went up a big hill and when we got to the top all of the horses were sweating. When we got back down to the paddock I had a race with Joanne and I won. My cousin took a picture of us.



3

Dad's horse was called Dainty and Joanne's horse was called Cara. Cara is black, Dainty is brown and Silver is silver. I would like a grey horse. Now when we go to Rutherglen we will know how to ride the horses.

4



WHEN I FOUGHT THE MONSTERS AND DRAGONS

One day I was camping when I heard a loud noise. I rushed out to see what had happened. It was a BIG monster!

I had two guns, I got one out but it was the wrong one. I fired it. It didn't kill the monster. I got the other one but when I was just about to shoot, it tried to shoot me. It almost did.

I lay there for at least 10½ minutes, then I got up. I looked for the monster. I looked everywhere for it and I finally found it. I got out both of my guns and fired. It worked. Then I went back into my tent.

The next day I went out and found a different monster. It looked exactly like the one I had shot. It had a gun. It tried to shoot me but this time the bullets bounced off me!!! It fired again (he didn't know that it was his last bullet).

It too bounced off. He tried to fire it again but no bullets came out of his gun. He kept trying and trying but it never worked, of course. I got out both my guns again and fired, but the monster dodged out of the way and I missed. I fired again and I missed. Then for the last time I fired and I shot him.

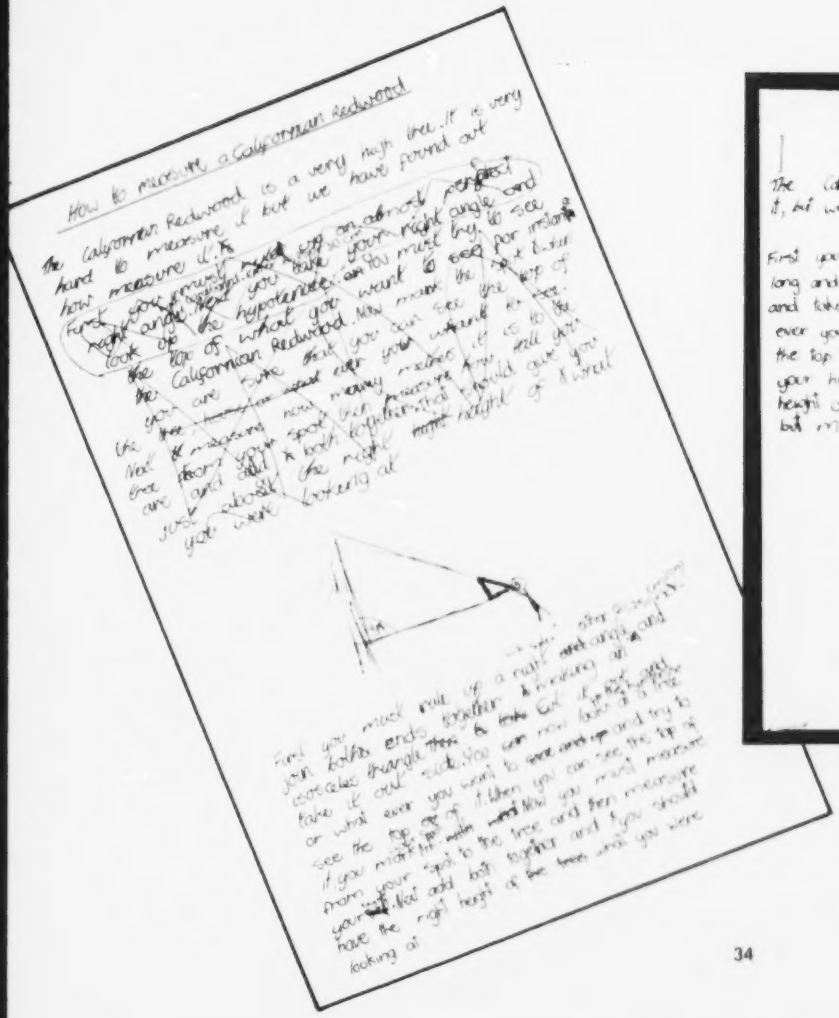
Later that night when I was sleeping I was woken up by a big thump outside my tent. It was the last and strongest monster on earth.

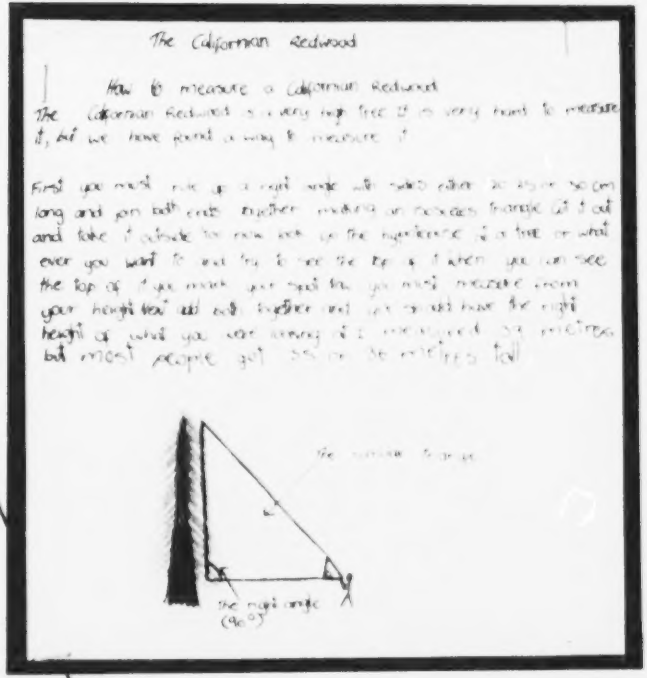
It had heat coming out of its mouth!!! It tried to kill me with it but I jumped one of my highest jumps and the heat got my tent instead. That was good, but it wasn't as good as you think!!!

Because then I had nowhere to camp. In the end I had to go home. Oh well, too bad I couldn't stay.

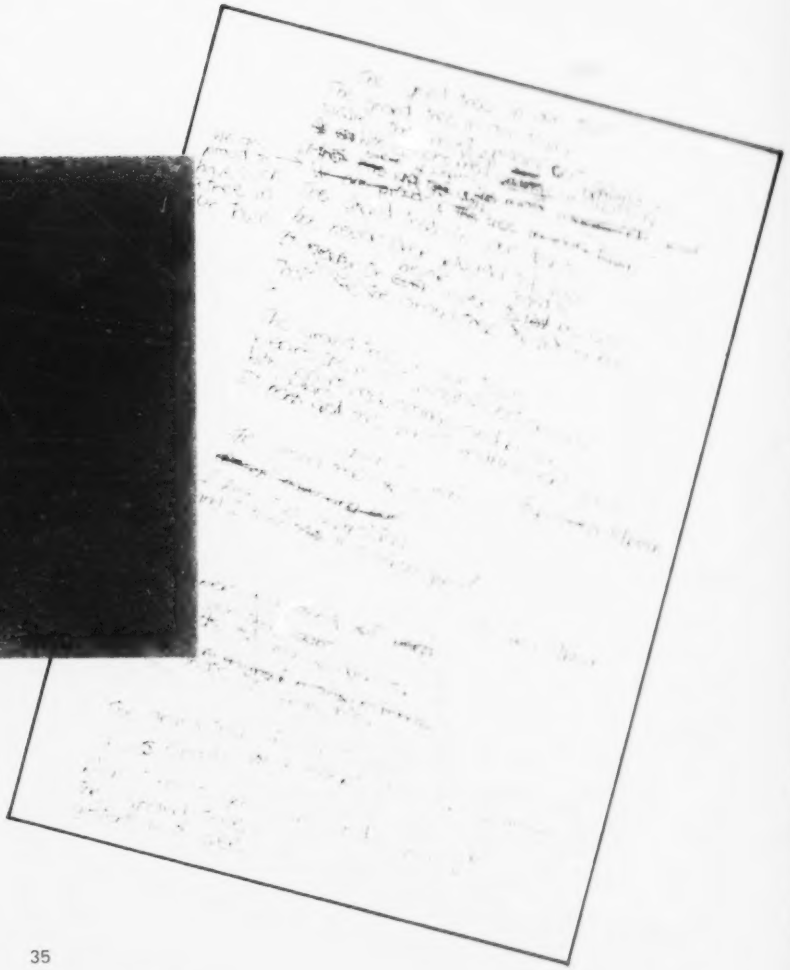
But a few months after that....

Two pieces of writing, showing one year's development in an initially reluctant writer.

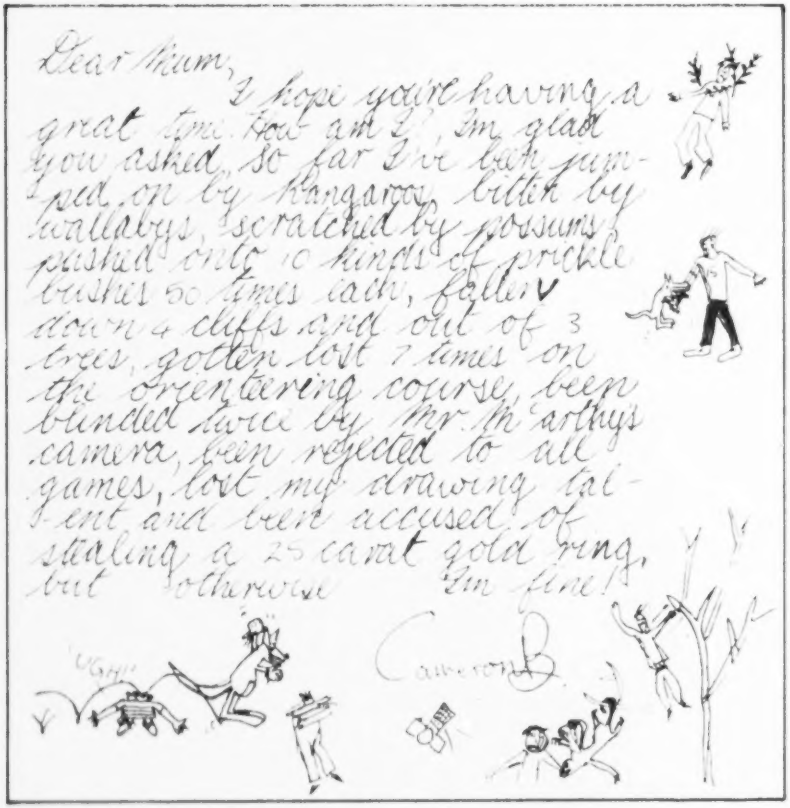

How to measure a Californian redwood
The Californian Redwood is a very high tree. It is very
hard to measure it, but we have found out
how to measure it.
First you need a right angle
Look up the hypotenuse
Californian Redwood
the right angle


The Californian Redwood
How to measure a Californian Redwood
The Californian Redwood is very high tree It is very hard to measure
it, but we have found a way to measure it
the right angle
(90°)

Draft and final versions of an information poster showing application of maths, science and writing skills.



Imaginative response to a local landmark, including a first draft which shows the writing process 'at work'.


Dear Mum,
I hope you're having a great time. How am I? Im glad you asked, so far I've been jumped on by kangaroos, bitten by wallabys, scratched by possums, pushed into 10 kinds of prickle bushes 50 times each, fallen down 4 cliffs and out of 3 trees, gotten lost 7 times on the orienteering course, been blinded twice by Mr. Smarthys camera, been rejected to all games, lost my drawing talent and been accused of stealing a 25 carat gold ring, but otherwise Im fine!
Cameron B.

Humour used in a different genre.

LEGO
There was an island made of Lego.
It was 5000m wide and 6000m long.
It had everything made of Lego. Even the fruit, the water, the sky, the sea and the people were made of the colourful Lego.
But there was one thing wrong.
There was a battle going on in the Lego island.
It was funny because they never died.
Never ever. All they did was fall and get up again.
The Lego people were not scared.
Everything grew and everything died all over and over again.
One day a man found the isle and thought it was real.
The island was broken by the man when the war was on and the island sank with the man.
That was the end of the Lego island.

A story from a child for whom English is a second language.

by [illegible] **Richmond Bridge and scene**

I saw some ducks at Richmond Bridge
They were fluffy, brown, white and grey.
It was a beautiful sunny day.
There were ripples in the water not far away
from where we were sitting.
The Bridge was made out of sand stone.
It was yellow and cream.
The sand stones were big and small.
It was so quiet you could hear the birds
call.
The bridge is very old
I think it's beautiful.

Page from a class book which was the result of an excursion.

THE SPIDER

The spider slowly stalked up the man's chest, stopping and starting with slow precise movements. Bill knew if he moved he'd surely die a long, painful death. The tarantula, about the size of a paperback, moved up to his chin. Bill found he could hardly control his shaking. Sweat poured from his forehead, down his cheek and onto the sweat stained pillow of the bed he was lying on. The spider now was up to his left eye. He thanked God that he had glasses to protect delicate areas of his face. He realised he'd have to get the spider off him before it made its attack. He quickly flicked his head, throwing the large thing from his head onto his arm, feeling the agony, the large fangs piercing the skin of his wrist. He screamed in pain as he saw the blood which covered his arm and hand. He quickly reached for his knife, grabbing it and crushing the horrible thing beneath the blade. He staggered to the kitchen, clutching the knife and digging it deep into his arm, gouging the poisoned flesh out before he passed out, never to feel pain again.

Imaginative young writer's use of language to create tension.

2 Understanding writing

Each of the modes of language extends the user's language and intellectual capacity. Listening, speaking, reading and writing all provide ways of engaging with the world. Writing, since it is more permanent than speech, supports memory and reduces the need for formula phrases and the cliches of oral speech. The writer can describe reality in much more complex ways and with a more diverse syntax and vocabulary than speech usually encourages. The permanence of writing allows the writer to be aware of style and to be open to suggestions about the organisation of ideas, attitudes and opinions. It also allows the writer to become self-critical about both language and thought. Writing can be reviewed; it can even be 'unsaid' in a way that speech cannot.

The process of writing is a challenging one. Even a superficial examination of writing shows there is much to learn about print symbols and conventions. But more importantly, the writer has to decide what kind of language to use and how to sequence ideas and has to consider what sort of reader will read the passage. If communication is to occur, the writer has to make as full a use as possible of the resources of language to replace what the immediate situation supplies in conversation.

In recent years it has become clearer how listening, speaking, writing and reading can be simultaneously encouraged so that each mode supports the others to the individual's general intellectual benefit. If the opportunity is given to learn all these modes of language in mutually supportive ways, the learner finds it easy to meet the demands of each mode of language.

A study of oral language indicates how the learner progresses through a sequence of stages towards an acceptable performance level. But early speech is not purposeless speech. From a very early age, the child uses speech to obtain attention, make comment, demand and maintain a place in the world. In speaking with the child, adults extend the child's ability to notice the world, to hear and make stories and generally to learn to make sense of living. Adults seem instinctively to realise that they should respond to children's meanings rather than always paying attention to the correctness of children's articulation, syntax or vocabulary.

Just as children are surrounded by adults whose talk provides models of speech in use, so children need to see to what purpose adults put writing. Adults need to provide active models of the act of writing.

Language grows through language use. The command of writing grows through writing, even when the child has grasped only a few of the letter symbols and the conventions of print. The child's experiences of life and of speech bring a gradual and growing command of all the levels of language. Writing is no longer taught as if children must have a command of all the symbols, all the relations between speech and writing and most of the conventions of print, punctuation and layout, before using writing for their own purposes.

To acquire a confident view of writing children need many opportunities to write about their own topics, tasks, interests and purposes. Conventions such as spelling must serve the purpose of writing which, in turn, is given purpose by a variety of human goals. Spelling is important, but it is not an end in itself. Its importance must be seen in a context where the individual grows to use writing to aid both thought and communication. Spelling, like the other writing conventions, should be learned through practice in writing activities which are seen by the child to have meaning and purpose. Like speech, spelling develops through a number of interim stages when children produce their own forms of spelling. These forms gradually approach standard spelling forms as children become more familiar with written language through their reading and writing.

Reading aloud one's own writing calls attention to the need for punctuation to help the reader interpret writing correctly. When sharing writing with a group, the young reader can be helped to notice the importance of punctuation in making meaning clear. Writing and reading are learned in real use. Writing groups need a purpose for their editorial activity. A general concern with writing as a means of filling forms and penning business letters distorts the understanding of the range of purposes for which writing can be used. Writing and its associated skills should not be taught as if it is believed implicitly that only a few people will ever command the acts of writing in all their rich possibilities.

Writing and thinking subtly interact. Writing is not merely an expression of what the writer thought prior to the act of writing. Thought is actually affected by writing. In this respect, writing adds to our awareness of who we are and how we are making sense of the world.

'When I write it is as if
all the ideas in my head have come together
into order and when I write
I am reading them for the first time.'

* N. Martin et al., *Writing and Learning*, W.L.E., London, 1976, p. 23.

From the moment children come into contact with print, they begin to notice the shapes of print. They begin to use these shapes in trial ways to discover how to write for a variety of purposes and in an increasing number of forms.

As they grow accustomed to purposeful print, children pay increased attention to names, labels and notices in the classroom, the street and shops. Children's own writing proceeds through a set of stages:

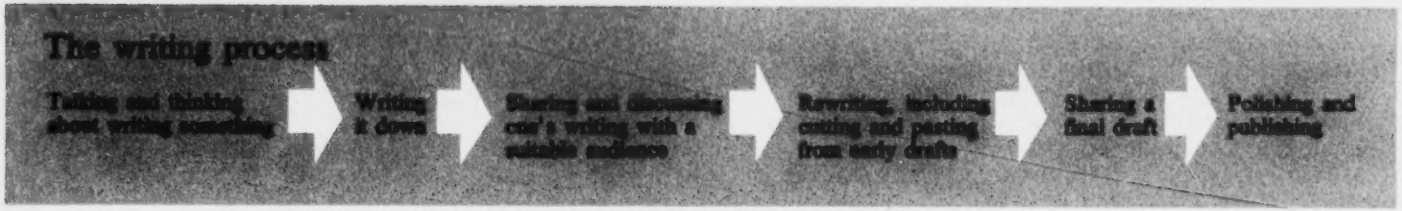
- scribble accompanied by talk or used to support talk;
- unconventional letters similar to the unconventional sounds of early speech;
- strings of conventional letters accompanied by talk or action;
- groups of letters with spaces between groups and accompanied by talk or action;
- writing that reveals the child's developing awareness of sound-to-letter correspondence and which the child can read with increasing fluency.

Occasionally in the very early years, a child may simply be enjoying the experience of making marks on a page. This is mingled with the desire to make messages. Both these uses of 'early writing' have their place in the child's growing integration of the acts of writing into daily life.

As the child grows in confidence and competence in writing, the effort to write needs warm response and helpful comment about both meaning and expression. The child also needs encouragement to write as often and as variedly as possible.

The stories the child hears and the programs the child watches, as well as the day-to-day experiences of growing up, provide the framework for the child's drawing and writing. Representing ideas, emotions, things and experiences in painting and drawing gives the child thinking time. The child needs this time to think about what it is that can best be written. The child's art and writing support each other. Adult and child can work together at this stage so that the child sees how to write down what can be said. In this way the child begins to see how speech can be expressed as written symbols on the page.

Writing can be a lonely business if it is not set in a social context which supports and rewards the writer's effort. The writer needs to


The writing process
Talking and thinking about writing something
Writing it down
Sharing and discussing one's writing with a suitable audience
Rewriting, including cutting and pasting from early drafts
Sharing a final draft
Polishing and publishing

see the point of recording ideas in writing and reviewing what has been written.

The child moves readily from early shared writing with an adult into the production of illustrated books which may belong to either the world of fiction or the world of fact. Just as caption books and labelling begin with the child's own activities and interests, so early writing should be on topics which the child chooses. What is required is that the child be given the opportunity and time to write every day. Through discussions with both the teacher and fellow pupils, some of these pieces of writing may be chosen for further development.

Learning to write obviously requires time and effort. The writer is the first reader but the piece may then be shared with a writing group or class. The writer may present the piece orally for comment or place it before a small peer group who act as editors. Children are willing to help a fellow writer by pointing out where ideas have not been clearly or adequately expressed. But it takes time to create the helping atmosphere which supports this kind of co-operative group work. It takes time, also, to allow the child to consider suggestions and decide whether to incorporate them in 'rewrites' of a piece. The time sequence can be set out as follows.

Occasion to choose a topic → **Writing** → **Occasion to share writing with other readers and note suggestions** → **Occasions for publishing, rewriting, cutting, pasting etc.**

TIME PASSING →

The choice of a form for the final publication is influenced by such things as the presentation in books the writer has seen, the layout of newspapers and journals or the advertisements on television. Not everything a writer—any writer—attempts may reach the stage of polishing for publication but a significant amount should reach that stage. Publication for a variety of readers who discuss the writer's ideas rewards the writer's effort and encourages progress. Publication also gives the teacher the opportunity to help young writers see the need for spelling accuracy and punctuation (to help the reader obtain meaning) and attractive layouts (to hold the reader's attention).

The form of publishing can, of course, be more or less refined depending upon the facilities available. But the goal of publication should always be to help the young writer learn that writing is worth the effort and that it is a rewarding and meaningful way of using language.

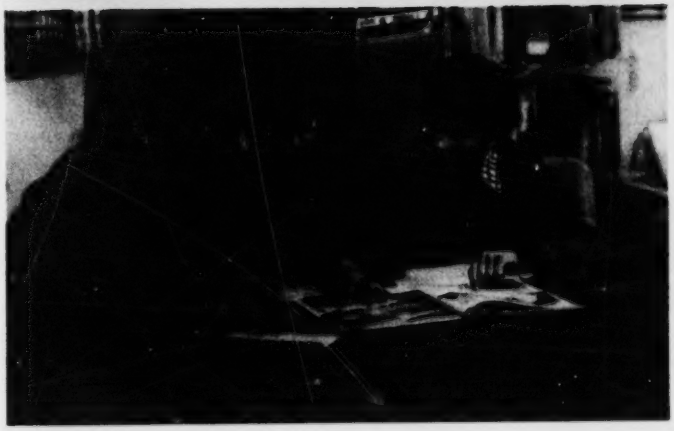
Varieties of writing

It is often assumed that all acts of writing are the same. As with speech, however, writing has many varieties or registers. In each piece of writing, the writer chooses the variety which appears to the writer to meet the needs of audience, purpose and topic.

Writing is an infinitely varied skill which is difficult to reduce to a succinct set of formulas. Many well-known authors stress that to be a successful writer it is necessary to write frequently—even at those times when the writer is unsure of what to say. Just as speech changes in register and style to suit the purposes to which it is being put and the context in which it is being used, so writing needs an appropriate form to meet the purpose or function it serves.

However, it is one of the difficulties and the strengths of writing that, in practice, forms and purposes do not always fall into clearly separable categories. Many pieces of writing draw upon several forms and serve several purposes at once.

FORM	PURPOSE
Reporting and observing	to describe and express one's understanding; to represent for others.
Making personal notes, keeping a diary, journal etc.	to help memory; to make sense of fleeting experience; to allow for reflection; to make connections.
Writing a story	to represent or recall an imaginative experience; to share this with someone else; to reflect again on experience.
Writing jokes, riddles etc.	to entertain; to play with words; to organise ideas.
Writing instructions or directions, stating information	to represent processes; to organise information for easy access and retrieval; to share ideas; to communicate.
Writing poetry	to explore the possibilities of language; to express emotion; to capture an experience or image; to find out what one felt.



Levels of abstraction in language

Language allows the user to represent the world and action without any actual engagement. The representation may occur at different orders of generality (chairs can be seen as chairs or as furniture) and at different levels of abstraction (the city can be the city of Hobart, the city in Australia or the city in history). Language also allows the writer or thinker to reflect on experience, organise it and come to understand it more fully.

The following questions highlight the ways in which thought and language can deal with different orders of generality and different levels of abstraction:

What is happening? The writer uses common categories to describe and make sense of experience.

What happened? The writer uses previous experience in combination with the present to confirm or reject, to extend or refine, the categories used to describe and understand experience.

What usually happens? The writer working at this level can be encouraged to generalise rules and patterns of expectation from particular events and experiences observed and discussed. Being able to state generalisations gives the child a capacity to be self-aware and self-critical.

What may happen or what is going to happen? By comparing anticipations and predictions with actual outcomes, the writer or thinker may be stimulated to notice the power of abstract thinking.

Writing is obviously more permanent than speech. It has the advantage that it can be reviewed and edited in ways that speech cannot. Once something is written down, the young writer can be helped to note the interesting patterns in the language. Writing, too, allows the child to notice the sense being made of experience. Writing and editing one's writing extend the individual's ability to be both creative and self-critical.

Audience

For some writing and some drafts, the writer is also the audience. Diaries, lists and reminders are examples of this. More often however, the writer, like the speaker, seeks other audiences. Audiences may vary from persons who are very close to the writer in physical proximity and shared experience to those who are remote in space and time. Awareness of audience affects how ideas are expressed. A child's reason for writing may vary, too, in relation to the intended audience. In practice then, audience and purpose combine to affect the form of a child's writing.

This combination of influences on writing can be set out as follows:

The reader. The writer may write for a reader who is an intimate or for a remote stranger or for anyone between these extremes.

The topic or experience. The writer may write about anything from a topic or experience which has been shared by the reader through to something which is completely unknown to the reader.

Starting points for writing

Finding topics for speaking is not difficult if children are confident that adults are interested and that their views will be rewarded by adult attention and helpful comment. Children's writing also begins with children's interests. Children can draw upon their real, imagined or vicarious experiences for the subject matter of their writing. They can benefit from writing about their past experiences of actual living and about past imaginative activity.

Children like to write about what has happened at home, in school, on television, in their reading, in the stories read to them, in their imaginative games and in their dreams and day-dreams. They may write to imitate well-loved stories and to repeat memorable characters or even memorable passages. Successful adult imaginative writers frequently derive their ideas, styles of expression and topics from the work of other writers. In a sense, adult writers conduct a kind of conversation with other writers. Children, too, use stories heard, read or watched as a basis for their writing efforts, though with encouragement, they learn to have an individual voice. So reading and talking combine to contribute to the growth of the child's understanding of both the act of writing and its place in active and reflective lives.

Children need encouragement to extend their powers of expression. Imagination is involved in all recall and anticipation as well as in the individual's interpretation of the world.

Children should choose what to write themselves, but this does not preclude the teacher from initiating and sustaining conversations about what might be interesting ideas or topics for writing. Teacher and class together can consider how to include writing as part of the work right across the curriculum. But in both fiction and non-fiction, children's writing benefits from their experience with published books. By looking at the ways others write, spell, punctuate and arrange their presentation, children are helped to notice how to meet public standards in writing. As a result of experience with books, children meet different formats, layouts, decoration and illustration. Children are motivated to look more

closely at how books are organised and this close inspection helps children develop their own criteria for producing and judging books.

Writing generally follows a recurring sequence:

- ***pre-writing***—events, discussion, representational activities in art and reading;
- ***writing***—drafts for sharing and discussion;
- ***rewriting***—adjusting, rewriting, starting anew;
- ***editing***—being helped to keep the reader in mind;
- ***publishing***—selecting a piece for development and choosing a format to attract a readership.

Adult writers do not publish everything they write; nor need children. When a piece recommends itself to child and teacher, it should be prepared carefully for publication. Children should be expected, encouraged and given opportunities to publish in such a manner that they come to see the point of considering their readers' needs. These needs include:

- coherent sequencing of ideas;
- legible handwriting;
- layout which attracts the eye;
- helpful juxtaposition of text and illustration;
- punctuation which helps make meaning clear;
- spelling of an appropriate standard.

A good editor begins by helping the writer see where success has been achieved and where there are the beginnings of expression worthy of further development. The editor talks about the writer's overall work and leads a shared examination of particular passages the writer may need to rethink or rewrite.

Starting points for writing

The following approaches will help writers:

- **Encourage the child to 'get ideas down'.**
- **Focus on the child's ideas and the language in which the ideas have been expressed.**
- **Alert the child to the value of approximations in both ideas and conventions while writing an early draft.**

Reviewing the program

In reviewing children's writing, a distinction must be drawn between learning to write and learning to spell; between developing the physical skills of handwriting and acquiring the capacity to use writing as a medium which extends thought and language. The paramount aim in a writing program is to encourage each child to become someone who can and does use writing as part of living. So spelling, punctuation and handwriting must be seen within the overall program of children's writing.

Children come to school knowing how to use a great deal of the grammar of their speech community. They know little about the theory of grammar amd they cannot state the rules but their language shows evidence that they follow rules. It often happens that a child's speech community is not one which follows the rules of standard Australian English. The usage of English varies from place to place and from social group to social group—indeed, from age group to age group. But as children develop, they can learn to adjust their usage so that it is appropriate for different groups and different social situations.

Children can be helped to notice and try out versions of English by talking with speakers of such 'dialects', by dramatising stories which allow them to practise such usages, by hearing and reading a variety of stories and by noticing the demands of various audiences on their own speaking and writing.

Telling children *about* the grammar of standard English will do little to help them acquire that use for themselves. But as they grow in confidence as writers, children benefit from learning how to talk about their own written language. In presenting their work to various audiences, they find it useful to learn the technical language about language. They begin to see the point of classifying words as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions. They learn to write better by noticing how sentences can be ordered and re-ordered into longer units of meaning such as paragraphs and chapters. The terminology of language is best learned as each child sees the need for it, especially when talking to others about writing and editing.

The criteria for developing a writing program will change emphasis as children mature and as they gain confidence in writing, but these criteria apply to all children.

Teachers—and adults generally—should consider the writing program to see that each child:

- sees purpose in writing;
- sees how writing involves making meaning;
- tries out an increasing number of forms of writing;
- comes to see value in editing what has been written;
- adjusts writing for a variety of audiences;
- discusses various styles to determine which one best suits topic, audience and purpose;
- considers the meaning of the whole passage;
- adds to the range of topics, audiences and purposes for writing.

Since writing and thinking are related, children must progress through a number of stages before acquiring the ability to write on general or abstract topics. And if each child keeps a portfolio of written work, the child and the teacher can evaluate progress over periods of time.

The following are important points in assessing children's progress:

- children's growth in the ability to communicate thoughts, feelings and information in writing;
- the extent to which writing is seen to serve both expressive and communicative purposes;
- children's growing appreciation of the needs of a variety of audiences;
- the degree to which children draw upon models from their reading to extend their vocabulary and syntax and to inform their choice of styles;
- the extent to which children's reading and the discussion of their own writing lead to the use of more complex sentences and to control of paragraphing and of larger units of meaning;
- the degree of skill and enjoyment children show in editing their own writing and the range of publications in which they place the writing, e.g. joke and riddle books, poetry collections, travel journals, class novels, short stories;
- the willingness of children to recognise that writing poetry is an important means of enjoying the resources of language and reflecting on and expressing views on experience;
- the growth in both competence in and awareness of spelling, punctuation, layout and general presentation.

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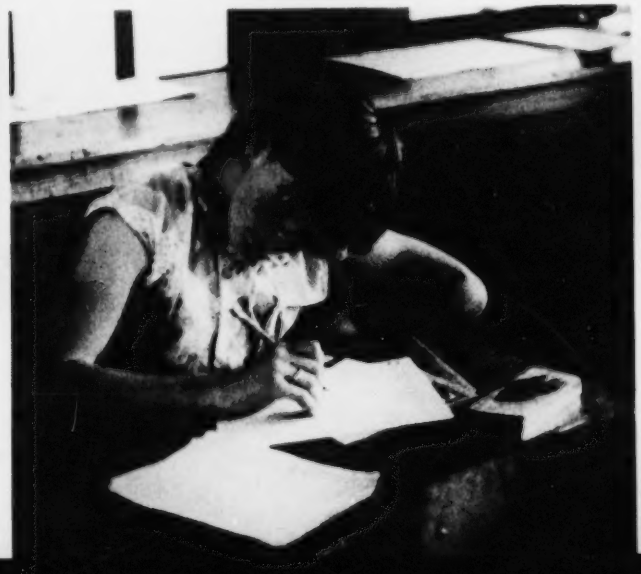
In conclusion ...

Learning to speak depends to a very great extent upon the response the speaker receives. The teacher's sympathetic response to a child's writing is similarly crucial. This response draws the child's attention to what the teacher sees as being important in the act of writing and in written language.

The most important concern in considering the child's writing should always be for the ideas the child has chosen to express in writing. Speech develops because adults and children are concerned to share and explore meaning. Writing, too, is encouraged through a focus on meaning. It is concern for meaning that leads to involving the writer in a growing responsibility for handwriting and general presentation. But it is of fundamental importance that the child be encouraged to continue to choose writing as a means of representing ideas and experience.

Language, emotion and thought are interdependent. Learning to write is more than learning how to make speech permanent. As well as providing a means of communicating with and understanding one's fellows, writing adds to the individual's powers of formulating feeling and thought.

Writing, like the other representational arts, allows an individual to reflect about actual and imaginative experience. It allows the writer to anticipate, plan, speculate and prepare. These acts of thought and of language lead to greater self-awareness. Writing obviously involves handwriting, spelling and punctuation but it is greater than these. Writing brings to the child's attention the subtle ways language and thought support each other. The act or acts of writing add to the ways a child can command language.



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